

An Applied, Dialogic, Autoethnography about Counseling Psychology Collaborations between Turkey and the U.S.

Lynette H. Bikos, Ph.D.
Seattle Pacific University

Ayşe Çiftçi, Ph.D.
Purdue University

Introduction

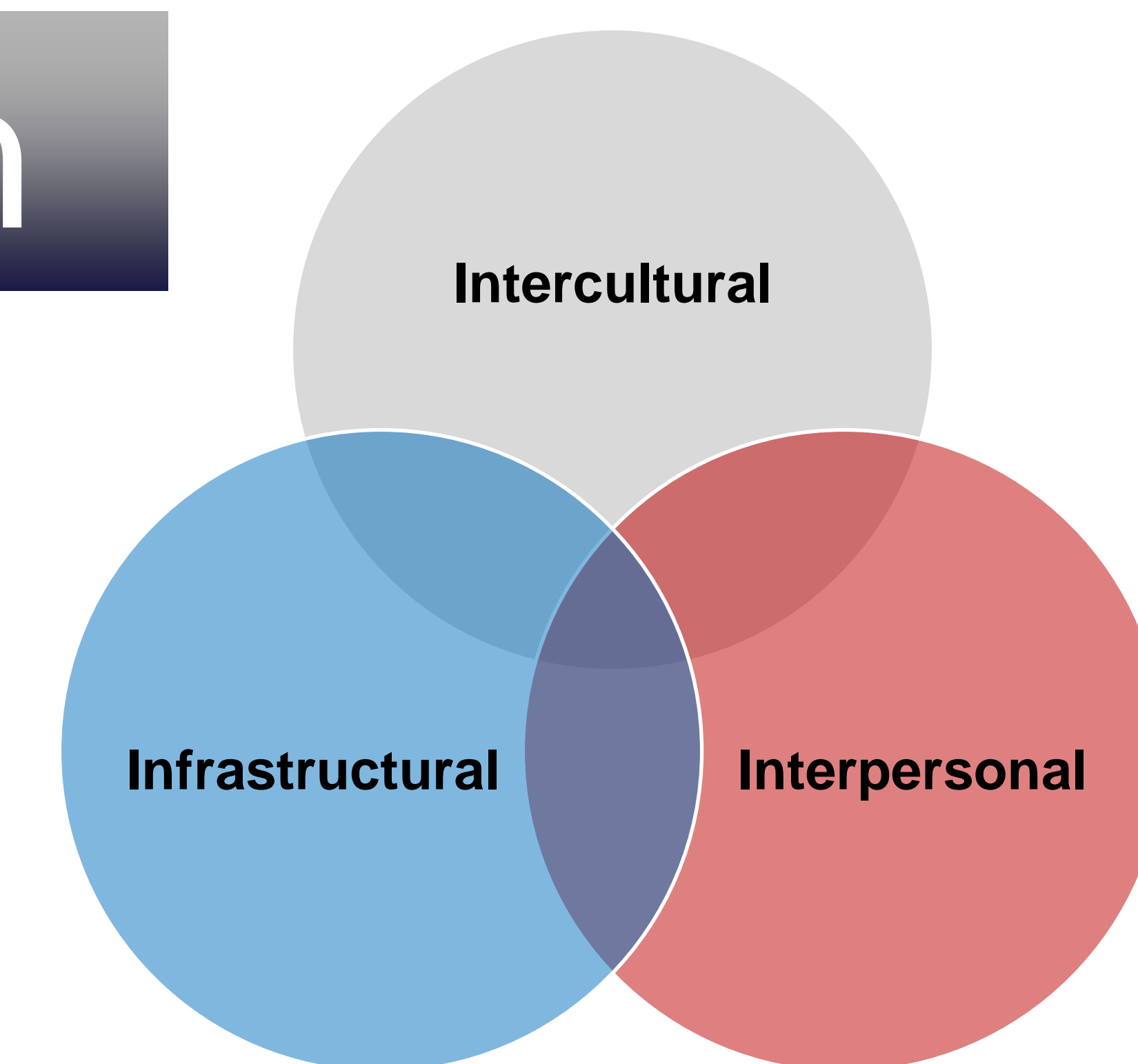
Psychologists have become increasingly interested in engaging in international collaborations. In fact, a major focus of the 2008 *International Counseling Psychology Conference* was devoted to discussing strategies for increasing such endeavors. Consequently, we began this social inquiry with the belief that engaging in deliberate dialogue about our ongoing research collaborations between Turkey and the U.S. might provide those considering (or currently engaged in) international research collaborations with ideas about the resources, constraints, and benefits of international collaboration.

Applied, Dialogic, Autoethnography. Our qualitative research strategy was *analytic autoethnography* (Anderson, 2006). This poststructuralist research strategy may be thought of a bridge between the realist ethnographic tradition and the more “vulnerable,” “intimate,” and “untamed” approach of evocative autoethnography (Ellis & Bochner, 2006, 433). Analytic autoethnography is characterized by five features: *complete member researcher status, analytic reflexivity, a visible and active presence in research results, active dialogue with informants, and a commitment to developing theoretical understandings of the phenomena.*

Procedures. The dialogues emerged from nearly 6-months of weekly telephone/e-mail exchanges. Each week, we began our research session with a phone call. Often, the topic was a presently-occurring professional collaboration issue. In accordance with the emergent and inductive nature of our method, we had no specific outline or goal; rather, our conversations were nonlinear and have spiraled into deeper levels of intimacy and disclosure.

Dialogue, Results, & Discussion

We conceptualize the success of research, teaching, and practice collaborations between the U.S. and Turkey as a result of three interrelated factors: intercultural, infrastructural, interpersonal. What follows is a figure of our conceptualization and excerpts from our extensive dialogue (Bikos in blue; Çiftçi in red). Consequently, we wonder if our model is meaningful for others involved in international collaborations. We would love your feedback: lbikos@spu.edu; ayse@purdue.edu.



Intercultural factors: I believe that in international collaborations, researchers would need “cultural translators”...

Time and Space: Turkish individuals have their own “time and space” concept. Unless you’re working in Turkey, you may think that this would be an easy construct to deal with. However, I have witnessed a couple of American faculty struggling with the return rate of e-mails or overall relaxed rhythm. I certainly experienced what I interpreted to be issues of “time and space” while I was in Turkey. For example, when I gained an office-mate at METU, I thought it would be most parsimonious that we each used the shelves closest to our desk. He didn’t think that way and so our books were on, what I perceived to be, each others’ shelves.

Collectivism/Individualism: I think a part of the “enmeshed” work relationships is the collectivist nature of the culture. The most important aspect I see is the focus on others and the importance given on the connections with others. In Turkey, people work together, live together, cry together, laugh together. Loneliness is a concept that has a very negative meaning, something to avoid at all times.

Boundaries/Privacy: As a Turkish person living in the US, I don’t think I can go to a neighbor/friend after supper, ring the bell and spend a couple of hours with chatting or socializing. Even though I would be very sure that they are just watching TV and not have any work (which would be exceptional for American culture), I’d still not go.

Western privilege vs. arrogance: I’ve noticed that in my collaborations with my colleagues at METU that I always get “the last word” ... is it Western privilege? Yes. American Arrogance? No. I think there is a difference between privilege and arrogance. When you came to METU, you “represent” America, your culture. We still read and learn theories, methods from the people in YOUR culture, in YOUR language. I think it would be naive to think that this will not create a privilege.

Also discussed: Hierarchy. Paternalism. Developing country. Kismet/Fatalism. Efficiency. Teamwork. Leadership. Insider/Outsider. Power.

Infrastructural factors:

Location (“On” vs. “Off” site): ... international collaboration was so much easier when I was in-country, on-site, and only employed by METU. When we were in the same place, we communicated regularly; I think that our daily interactions kept us on (relatively) on schedule and interpersonally accountable to each other.

Institutional Review Boards: When you are a researcher sponsored by a US institute, there are restrictions. I’m thinking about IRBs, ethical responsibilities, liability, and ownership of the data. I agree. METU didn’t have an IRB. Wanting my research practices to be consistent with U.S. standards, I created an ad hoc committee of senior faculty, who reviewed and “signed off” on my research proposal.

Institutional Commitments: The Ministry of Higher Education (YOK) in Turkey funds students to attend in the West. Yet, when they return, YOK has complete power and the student must work where they say; YOK also sets the standards for tenure, publication, and so forth.

Malpractice Insurance: From a practice perspective, APA malpractice insurance doesn’t cover you the minute you step outside the country. I didn’t do much, but for the few cases I took, I was *practicing naked* – scary stuff!

Interpersonal factors: I certainly experienced what I interpreted to be cultural differences while I was in Turkey. However, when I stop to analyze them, I don’t know that I could categorize the issues neatly and consistently into categories. I think they must interact with our individual differences as well.

Motivation for global projects: Most people would use terms such as “opening your eyes” or “widening your worldview” or “gaining new perspective” to explain the reason or motivation for increasing interest in globalization.

Open, curious, flexible: One last thing I would add is the importance of your personality. I believe, in any international collaboration, both parties should be “curious” and open about each other. Your curiosity and interest in the culture was exceptional and connected you to others. I think it’s more than just being curious. Someone who is merely curious, might be pushy and intrusive. I think being open to new experiences (a sense of adventure) and flexible is helpful.

Traditional/Non-traditional roles: In my opinion, not the part of your personality (leader/finisher) but the “traditional female” role/part of your personality helped in being accepted. As a traditional culture, women with relatively traditional roles are always welcomed.